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**“Los Colores del Duelo”: Expressive Arts Therapy as a Culturally Sensitive Intervention
for Grief at an Individual and Systemic Level**

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Abstract

Grief is a natural human experience that may occur at different levels: individual, familiar, community and systemic. Studies show that grieving may look different across cultures: considering that there are countries with a more collective nature, such as Peru, grieving and healing may involve interventions that allow working with grief at multiple levels. At the same time, grief theories have evolved through time, and bereavement has been largely conceptualized from a Western perspective. In recent years, the cultural component was added to clinicians' and health professionals' considerations when approaching grief and bereavement. This thesis will explore Western grief theories but will focus on the unique a cultural frame of reference from a Latin American country, Peru. This literature review will also consider culture and artistic expressions in Peru, as a fundamental coping skill that is engrained in the Peruvian collective healing process. My work will discuss the intrinsic healing component of the expressive arts found in many cultures, and the fluid nature of the expressive arts therapy as an intervention. The latter, I argue, offers an opportunity to approach grief from a culturally sensitive lens. At the same time, it provides the flexibility to work with loss at multiple levels and navigate healing from a community-based approach. This opens space for contemplating the appropriateness of the expressive arts therapy as a culturally sensitive intervention for grief work.

Keywords: collective culture; Expressive Arts Therapy; community; death; loss; bereavement; grief; culturally sensitive.

“Los Colores del Duelo”: Expressive Arts Therapy as a Culturally Sensitive Intervention for Grief at an Individual and Systemic Level

Loss and grief are inherent experiences to human life that may emerge during individual work with clients. However, the experience of loss may come in multiple systems: family, community, society, political, environmental (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003). How do we process loss with our clients when there are additional systemic losses taking place? Given the universality of death, it seems essential for many clients to process their experiences of loss in order to live a complete life (Rogers, 1993).

Grief may present as a response to loss and can manifest in multiple dimensions: physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual (Hall, 2011). Grief can also be perceived from a broader outlook and beyond the experience of death. For example, one can feel the loss of security when moving to a new home, or experience the end of a relationship, or even have a loss of identity. In this sense, grief and loss may be one of the main underlying reasons that lead individuals to seek professional help in mental health (Hall, 2011). Bereavement is a natural reaction to loss that can be experienced at many developmental stages, by children and teenagers, as well as adults. According to Rogers (1993), it is important to allow each individual to grieve in the way they need to. However, what is the role of family, community and culture in the process of grieving, and how can the therapist embrace these as active agents in the grieving process?

Furthermore, mental health professionals have been increasingly reviewing the evolving theoretical frameworks surrounding the grieving process and its cultural implications. Vazquez and Rosas (2011) call for a need to adapt existing models of grief to complement the elements of the griever's internal process as well as its social environment. Thus, the authors advocate for

clinicians' awareness towards their clients' cultural settings and their interactions with the grieving process. The meanings of death, the type of emotions that come along with it, and their intensity, can differ depending on the cultural context (Rosenblatt, 2017). Failure to comprehend grief as culturally malleable, may lead to wrongly pathologize grieving variations that are rightful to specific sociocultural contexts (Rosenblatt, 2017). This calls for a need to understand the multiple expressions of grief and develop appropriate interventions from a culturally sensitive lens.

Multiple cultures throughout history have engaged in acts of creation and artistic expression as a way to heal (Levine, 1992). Often times, collective rituals embedded with diverse forms of art, encouraged a sense of expression and connection that facilitated the integration of suffering and other human experiences. Nowadays, expressive arts therapy is a form of intervention that uses art, music, dance, movement, drama, poetry, creative writing, play and other forms of expression within the realm of psychotherapy (Malchiodi, 2005). The expressive arts therapies are another practice to work with clients towards healing, while nurturing awareness, interpersonal connection and personal growth (Malchiodi, 2005). According to Malchiodi (2005), through artistic expression, one can acknowledge grief, explore feelings and thoughts about death, and process loss.

Coming from a Latin American country and a family-oriented culture myself, has made me experience my own personal and systemic losses from a unique standpoint. I have witnessed and engaged in artistic expressions myself, to externalize pain and grieve individually and collectively, leading me to question whether this may be a cultural characteristic or an inherent component of grief work. This thesis is an exploration of how the expressive arts therapies can serve as a culturally sensitive intervention for grief work in Peru, a Latin American country.

In this thesis, I will explore literature about the historical context on bereavement, in order to understand how grief theories have changed through time. Then, I will move forward to studying examples of loss in Peru, a collective culture. This will emphasize the need to understand grief from both, an individual and systemic perspectives. Finally, I will discuss the appropriateness of the expressive arts therapies as a culturally sensitive intervention for grief.

Literary Review

Historical context on bereavement

Freud's psychoanalytic theories and his work "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), had a significant impact on most theoretical frameworks surrounding grief in contemporary psychology (Granek, 2010; Vazquez & Rosas, 2011). Freud explored the concept of grief and mourning as a process that permitted bereaved individuals to detach themselves from the dead one, in hope of moving forward with their lives. This first approach towards a model of mourning focused on the internal processes rather than treating it as a social or interpersonal affair (Vazquez & Rosas, 2011). In addition, mourning was perceived as a painful process that had an end, a culmination achieved once one could finally disconnect from the lost person. In this sense, the inability to complete this task and an ongoing attachment with the dead loved one would be considered pathological. This perception implies the pathologizing of what was previously considered in history, an ordinary human reaction to loss (Granek, 2010).

During the early 20th century, the concept of grief gained more relevance within the psychological realm. Psychology as a discipline was rising as a health science and grief received increasing attention in the medical world. This is not surprising, as grief was one of the main struggles for individuals at the time, considering the world wars taking place (Archer, 1999; Granek, 2010). The concept of "grief work" was coined by Erich Lindemann towards the 1940's.

Lindemann conducted an empirical study with bereaved clients and conceptualized what would be considered normal and abnormal symptoms of grief at that time (Archer, 1999; Granek, 2010).

For Lindemann (1944), a “normal” grief course would involve liberating the bereaved individual from the link with the dead person. This process suggested the adjustment to a new reality and the creation of new bonds and relationships in a world where the dead person no longer exists. Lindemann worked with family members who lost someone in the Cocoanut Grove fire in Massachusetts, and his study argued that grief could impact an individual both, psychologically and physically (Worden, 2018). Grief symptoms and emotional responses that would have been considered normal included: some sort of body distress or somatic response, concerns about the image of the person who died, guilt, hostile responses, and an inability to function at the level observed previous to the loss (Worden, 2018). Consequently, the term grief was reconstructed from being a psychiatric notion, to becoming a medical diagnosis, thus perpetuating the concept of grief as a possible pathology. It is relevant to consider that Lindemann’s observations were obtained from a limited sample within a specific cultural context.

Around the 60’s of the 20th century, the rise of Parkes and Bowlby’s studies added to the understanding of grief within the psychological and psychiatric communities and provided comprehensive descriptions of grief as a process (Archer, 1999; Granek, 2010). Bowlby’s attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980) provided the understanding that individuals tend to create meaningful bonds with others and that emotional responses may emerge as these bonds are broken or endangered (Archer, 1999; Worden, 2018). Bowlby initially suggested a parallel between grief and the responses of young children towards separation, transitioning from an

initial reaction of protest, to then despair and a final detachment. However, four phases of grief were later proposed by Bowlby and Parkes (1970): 1) numbness and disbelief with episodes of anger or distress, 2) yearning and searching, with possible anxiety and anger, 3) disorganization and despair, accompanied by apathy and/or feelings of depression, 4) reorganization as a final stage of recovery (Archer, 1999; Vazquez & Rosas, 2011; Worden, 2019). According to Bowlby and Parkes phases model, the final phase allowed an internal reorganization of the bereaved individual, providing the opportunity to reconnect and engage once again with regular life.

The perception of grief as a process was also explored by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) later on. Kübler-Ross proposed five stages towards the final recognition that the person has died: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1969). More often than not, readers tend to take Kübler-Ross' stage model in a literal way, and question whether grief is actually a linear process. Worden (2018) suggests conceptualizing grief as “tasks for mourning”, that may occur in any order that suits the person in grief. The tasks of mourning include: 1) to accept the reality of the loss, 2) to process the pain of grief, 3) to adjust to a world without the deceased, 4) to find a way to remember the deceased while embarking on the rest of one's journey through life. The last task denotes integrating the memory of the lost person in one's life, even if it is in a newfound way. Worden forth tasks contradicts previous grief models that encouraged cutting ties with the deceased.

The term Continuing bond, was later understood in grief psychology as the preserved attachment with the lost person. Saving objects that belonged to the deceased as transitional objects, talking to them, introjecting some of their values, taking in beliefs or characteristics may be some ways in which one can process the loss (Worden, 2018). However, the adaptability, benefits and/or struggles resulting from having a Continuing bond may depend on the attachment

style that the individual had with the deceased. Moreover, there may also be religious and cultural implications on maintaining a bond with the lost loved one. In some cultures, beliefs and rituals may engage the mourner in an active connection with the deceased, and the process of memorialization may emerge naturally within their norm (Worden, 2019).

Stroebe and Schut (2010), developed the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (DPM), as a response to previous bereavement models that limited the range of adaptative responses to grief. The authors also examined non-Western cultural grieving patterns and acknowledged the wide range of strategies and processes that may arise in a bereaved individual (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

The Dual Process Model of Coping recognizes two coping processes: loss-oriented and restoration-oriented (Stroebe & Schut, 2010). The first one refers to grief itself, thoughts about the death and the circumstances surrounding it, and the latter relates to coping with new roles and the changes that come after the loss. Stroebe and Schut (2010), claim that an adaptative grief process comes from an oscillation between both orientations. According to Stroebe and Schut (2010), cultural norms and their respective expressions of grief may influence communities to move towards a specific orientation, nevertheless, cultural differences are still compatible with this model.

Currently, fields exploring human behavior and social interactions, including anthropology, sociology and psychology, have shifted the approach towards grieving, acknowledging loss and grief as important occurrences that individuals experience regardless of their culture, background, or history (Archer, 1999; Rosenblatt, 2017). Nevertheless, it is pertinent to acknowledge that most theoretical frames around grief are based on research and perspectives from Western Europe and North America, while individuals, families and

communities may respond to death and loss in multiple way, according to their cultural values and historic background.

Cultural sensitivity in grief

Whether coping with grief involves navigating the loss itself, or acclimatizing to a new reality, the process involves a relational aspect. Grief may involve a dynamic interaction between intrapersonal and interpersonal narratives, as well as an intersection of collective and cultural histories (Klass, 2014). As will be further explored in this piece, the expressive arts therapies provide a wider and versatile frame that can allow a parallel exploration of grief and loss at both an individual and collective levels.

The way in which someone grieves may vary between individuals and amongst cultures worldwide. People tend to find different ways to navigate through sorrow and mourning over time, that feel true to their own beliefs. These may include rituals and socially influenced performances that are characteristic of their unique backgrounds (Cacciatore & DeFrain, 2015). While coping with loss is an individual experience, it also involves a familial context and a communal baggage of ancient meanings, rituals, values and customs (Cacciatore & DeFrain, 2015). Cacciatore and DeFrain (2015), encourage clinicians to acknowledge the individual's family system and social groups through a Cultural Building Block model, as a way to develop cultural sensitivity while working with grief.

According to Cacciatore and DeFrain (2015), culturally sensitive bereavement care should take into consideration the cultural blocks that influences an individual's identity. The biological culture block is based on genes and heritage, while the familial cultural layer involves aspects surrounding language, religion, geographical region of origin, traditional rituals beliefs and values. Moreover, Cacciatore and DeFrain (2015) also consider the elective culture and

experiential culture, as additional blocks to enhance the understanding of grief from a cultural lens. The former involves variables of a chosen identity, while the latter alludes to unpredicted and unelected life experiences that connect the individual to both conscious and unconscious identities, and that can even be passed down generations (Cacciatore and DeFrain, 2015).

Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the complex rituals, religious and traditional beliefs that may arise within individuals and families while dealing with loss. At the same time, the Cultural Building Block model, allows a new perspective on considering both, community and personal resources as supporting agents in the process of grieving and the integration of the loss, especially in Latin America, where culture inclines to collectivism rather than individualism.

Building bridges: loss from an intrapersonal to an interpersonal and systemic level

Bereavement is a universal human experience that comes with loss, however, the way in which grief is expressed and the appropriateness of rituals may also vary depending on gender, time, place; as well as societal and cultural norms (Sadak & Weiser, 2017). In different countries in South America, honoring the dead may involve celebrations with music, dance, and spiritual rituals to praise the departed (Sadak & Weiser, 2017). Some festivities surrounding remembrance, and the connection between the dead and the living, have its origins thousands of years ago with indigenous Pre-Columbian cultures (Sadak & Weiser, 2017).

Family, community and relationships are essential in a collectivist culture. Thus, a sense of interconnectedness, belonging and acceptance is needed for healing within this context. Given that grieving can happen in multiple layers, it would be relevant to consider a holistic approach towards the conception of the human experience. From a humanistic approach, a person-centered vision may provide a cross-cultural acknowledgement of an individual as a bio-psychosocial and spiritual being. According to Rogers, in order to provide a space for healing that is safe enough

for someone to drop their “façade” and start an inward journey, there should be three basic conditions: congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy (Rogers, 1999, p.121).

I believe that with these characteristics, a therapist then becomes an active companion in one’s process, being capable of entering the client’s frame of reference and conveying empathy and understanding. The expressive arts provide a channel to hold this companionship, and attune to one another through expressive movement, or artistic responses as an active witness to the client’s process. According to Rogers (1993), the Creative Connection happens within this encounter, and through the interaction between movement, art, writing and sound.

Roger’s “Creative Connection” model emphasizes healing as an inward journey that can allow connection between the individual creative force and a universal energy source, providing an encounter with the world and hence, a sense of unity. Consequently, the expressive arts and the Creative Connection provide an opportunity to work with unconscious material and gain insight, that will serve as additional resources needed to connect with others. This initial step in the healing process allows the person to engage in genuine and empathic relationships, and to initiate a more collaborative community and connection with the world, cultures and nature (Rogers, 1993). Having said that, engaging in the flow of creative expression may provide a bridge to navigate healing from the individual realm, to the communal and systemic levels. This model allows the opportunity to look at grief work and the therapeutic process from an interconnected stand point, where one can transition between individual and collective healing.

Peru: Many colors, multiple ways to grieve

In my piece, I am going to focus on the culture of bereavement in Peru, exploring grief from an individual and collective perspectives. Peru, among many Latin American countries, has a history rich in ancestral wisdom, as well as experiences of colonization, struggles and political

conflicts. According to Zavala (2012), it is a country that lives in contradictions, while its people yearn for social coexistence. In order for people to heal and grieve individually and collectively, clinicians have a responsibility to pay attention to the encounter with one another, the people they serve, their surroundings, their past as well as their present.

Current times involve uncertainty, and the menace of social and environmental wreckage (Zavala, 2012). The coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a global health crisis has brought individual and collective loss all around the world. In addition, Peru has also been living through times of social and political instability. What is this, if not the vulnerability of loss on many levels? Within this context, Peruvian expressive arts therapists advocate for the use of the arts and a mixture of ancient traditions and contemporary habits as a way to join as a community and work together towards health (Zavala, 2012).

Peru is a diverse country in many ways, from its distinct geographical sites such as deserts, beaches, mountains and jungles, to different traditions, rituals, dances and sub-culture. Even pre-Incas civilizations were quite diverse before the Incan empire was consolidated with political and cultural unity (Calderón, 2015). With the arrival of the Spanish, came the *Mestizaje* between the Andean and European people. Later on, in history, people from Africa, Japan and China also played an important role in Peruvian cultural development, and alongside, a long history of privilege and oppression, that is still present in modern Peruvian society (Calderón, 2015). Understanding the existence of sub-cultures within the Peruvian culture becomes another step towards working with grief intervention that is culturally sensitive.

For example, a subculture that is lively present in Peru, is the *Chicha* culture, that emerges with the migration of people from the Andes and the jungle towards the cities. With this physical movement, comes new traditions, culture, and stories that emphasize a mixture of urban

and rural customs. Consequently, a fusion between the Andean, Amazonian, African Peruvian, Chinese, and European realms (Calderón, 2015). This leads to the restructuring of new identities and also what can be experienced as loss. This encounter between the traditional and contemporary can also be seen in the arts. Calderon (2015) questions whether this sense of integration and transformation can be possible in areas such as health, psychotherapy and social transformation.

Within the *Chicha* culture, the use of bright colors became an important way to pay tribute to the Andean culture within Lima, the grey city. The emergence of the *Chicha* movement may have served as an expression of the continuing bond with the lost culture of origin after migration towards the city, and an approach to embrace a new cultural fusion and reality. At the same time *Chicha* art was used as a way to advertise social and musical events in the community, and later became a new style for artists and activists to protest against social injustices and the corrupt government during the last decades. Art collectives within this movement serve as examples of mourning, commemorating and advocating for a future in a collective way.

According to Milman (2019), Chicha art may also be a reaction to the separation that still exists between the indigenous people from Peru and those who come from a more European background. In this sense, *Chicha* art can be both, a celebration of the Andean culture, and a demand for the recognition of injustices, and thus, losses that may be a result of cultural systemic trauma (Milman, 2019). This may serve as a parallel to the current socioeconomic divisions in the country as well as the perpetuation of inequities that are lived as consequential losses of colonialism in this culture. The Lunder Arts Center at Lesley University was able to display a collection of street art and graphics from Peruvian artists. The following images were part of the

exhibit, and embody a few examples of the use of Peruvian artistic expression as a collective way to protest, but also heal as a community.

Figure 1

Chicha poster by Peruvian artist “Monky”



Note. Rojas Mesa, P. (n.d.). [Chicha poster Revolución by artist “Monky”]. From exhibit *Revolución Chicha: Street Art & Graphics of Perú* at the Lunder Arts Center. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Figure 2

Chicha poster by Peruvian artist collective “Amapolay”, manifesting activism in response to social and political climate



Note. Castro, F. & Fernandez, C. (n.d.). [Chicha poster by collective Amapolay]. From exhibit *Revolución Chicha: Street Art & Graphics of Perú* at the Lunder Arts Center. Cambridge, Massachusetts. *Barrios altos y la cantata no se olvidan*. This phrase alludes to the loss of civilians during internal conflict, and the desire to stand up against corrupt government and violence.

In the 80's Peru suffered from social and political instability that erupted into a period of internal conflict and violence. The government, and both guerrilla groups at that time, the Shining Path and Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), were all responsible for the death of thousands of civilians (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, n.d.). According to the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) there were more than 69,000 deaths during the terrorist wars.

Peru demonstrates a wide array of creative movement and expression to transform loss and hardship. As previously mentioned, the *Chicha* movement may represent the result of grieving systemic losses, and the encounter and formation of new identities. In addition, another example of the use of artistic expression as part of Peruvian grieving culture, and a way to connect the intrapersonal realm with the collective environment, is the *Yuyanapaq* photography exhibition. *Yuyanapaq* is a Quechua word which translates to the words “to remember,” and is a nationally recognized photographic exhibit that aims to commemorate the immense collective loss lived by Peruvians between 1980-2000.

The Peruvian TRC hoped to contribute to the construction of a shared and consensual memory surrounding the roots and causes of violence and war (Poole & Rojas-Pérez, 2010). This way, photography as an artistic expression, served as a way to build a bridge between the individual experience of loss, emotional responses of grief, and what Poole and Rojas-Pérez (2010) refer to “collective moral engagement with the past.” *Yuyanapaq* becomes a way to commemorate the dead, maintain a continuing bond with those who were lost, and also engage in a collective awareness of a grieving and healing process. Photography as an artform, serves as an indispensable resource to navigate grief from an individual experience to a communal narrative and therefore, engage in a healing process that considers both, personal and systemic loss.

Figure 3

Woman holding the picture of a missing family member in Ayacucho, 1984.



Note. *Woman holding the picture of a missing family member in Ayacucho, 1984.* [Photograph], by Vera Lentz. From photographic exhibit *Yuyanapaq. Para recordar*, 2015.

<https://idehpucp.pucp.edu.pe/yuyanapaq/>

According to Poole and Rojas-Pérez (2010), this photograph (Figure 3), depicts love for the missing person, as well as grief, loss and the mourning of many others that were killed or disappeared during the times of internal war and political conflict. This photograph is not only the symbol of a bereaved individual, but a grieving family, a community and a country.

Furthermore, in *Madness and Migration*, Cuya (2018) reflects on Peruvian filmmaking practices and visual approaches to illustrate social fractures as a result of a broken governing system. Peruvian artists in the film industry have used this form of expression to depict Peruvian characters that symbolize a population in amidst political conflict. Migrant characters may represent the physical displacement of people from rural areas due to economic and political

violence (Cuya, 2018), while also symbols of those who struggled with personal and collective loss. Peruvian film has also served as a collective expression of death loss as a human experience, as well as a portrayal of broader definitions of loss. Collective social losses experienced through asymmetrical class systems, economic and political struggles, in addition to a history of privilege and oppression that is still present in modern Peruvian society, all make up part of Peru's cultural identity. Peruvian film has become an approach to compile histories of death, migration, violence, abandonment and struggles, while also providing a space to advocate for the strength that may originate from strong relationships and a sense of community (Cuya, 2018).

Expressive Arts Therapy

Expressive Arts Therapy is an integrated and transdisciplinary approach (Estrella, 2019) that combines visual arts, movement, drama, music, writing and other creative processes to nurture both personal and community growth (International Expressive Arts Therapy Association, n.d.). As evidenced in different cultures and throughout history, expression through movement, sound, embodiment, poetry, and visual arts may provide opportunities for the liberation of pain, and with it, the acceptance of loss (Rogers, 1993).

The Expressive Arts Therapy is a relatively new field in the therapeutic world, and research in this field is still limited, especially with regard to the cultural aspect, as most of the studies come from the western leaders of the field. However, the use of the expressive arts as manifestations and communications of internal grief processes, often comes naturally in many cultures. The use of poetry, film, rituals, music, architecture and visual arts has been used since the beginning of times to express emotional responses to grief, commemorate loss and serve justice to all that a loss entail (Archer, 1999).

According to Levine (1992), the creative arts have the intrinsic ability to heal the human mind, spirit and soul, which is why he advocates for their use in psychotherapeutic work. Levine (1992) emphasizes that the healing capacity of the expressive arts have been recognized in many traditional cultures throughout history. Acts of creation have often been used in collective rituals where healing comes from a point of connection. According to Levine (1992), it is modern times, that the healer, or what is considered now the therapist, is conceived as a detached observer. In order to fully reconnect with one another, the expressive arts provide a channel for communication between therapist and client, individuals and families, groups and communities. In this sense, the expressive arts allow the possibility to work from multiple layers, from the individual realm to a more collective context.

Expressive Arts Therapy and bereavement

At an individual level, studies have shown the influence of creative interventions on the grieving process. Bat-Or and Garti (2019), conducted a study exploring art therapist's perceptions of the role of the art medium in treatment for bereaved clients. Art therapists were able to engage in a reflective exploration through drawings and interviews, that were later analyzed by researchers. The authors found that the art therapist considered art medium as a communication channel that provides a space for grief work, while also affecting the therapist and the therapeutic relationship (Bat-Or & Garti, 2019). Having said that, the arts also serve as a space for interpersonal connection that feels relevant while working with collective oriented cultures, and grief.

According to Bat-Or and Garti (2019), art medium may assist in clients' expression of intense emotions and nonverbal experiences regarding their loss. Mediums such as clay and sculpting could allow a physical and corporeal experience as part of the grieving process in

bereaved clients (Bat-Or & Garti, 2019). Moreover, findings corroborate that artwork may serve as an alternative way for non-verbal communication, that permits a deeper understanding of the client's emotional experiences.

The use of varied forms of art mediums provides opportunities for the client to fluctuate between experiences of deconstruction and reconstruction, as a way to integrate loss of a person (Bat-Or & Garti, 2019). According to Bat-Or and Garti (2019), reproducing and externalizing internal experiences while having a therapist bearing witness to the process, may enhance intimacy in their relationship and also allow the client to commemorate and move forward in their healing process. Furthermore, Bat-Or and Garti (2019) concluded that art therapists perceived the shared space as an opportunity for co-creating a new narrative with their clients. This study acknowledged the use of art medium, as channels to process grief and loss. It emphasized the role of the expressive arts and co-creation as a way to enhance therapeutic relationship between client and therapist, contemplating the appropriateness of expressive arts therapy as an intervention in grief work.

Loumeau-May et al. (2015), discuss the use of creative interventions to work with grieving children that have been affected by traumatic events. The authors advocate for the use of visual arts, storytelling and creative expression as a way to help them come to terms with what has been experienced, internalize the reality of death and preserve the connection with the deceased (Loumeau-May et al., 2015). According to their work, the use of artistic expression can also stimulate the development of coping skills, resiliency and recovery after trauma and violence. Furthermore, they explore the role of society in the healing process, encouraging collective actions as a way to transform tragedy into the opportunity to create meaning and enhance the strength as a community. Transforming suffering while finding meaning and hope

can be possible through the expressive arts and the act of creation itself, from an individual level and within a group setting (Loumeau-May et al., 2015).

Levine (1992) states that people have the ability to create even in the most extreme situations, and in this process of creation, is embedded the restoration and growth that is inherent to human experience. For Levine, accessing the arts involves a re-discovery of traditions that have existed within initial societies. Imagery, enactments, storytelling, music, dance, and many other rituals are just all parts of a collective process of transformation, where human sorrow may be given form. The author speaks about the image of a wounded healer where the one facilitating the process is no stranger to their own suffering. At the same time, the healing ability of the arts is lost if the creator, the person, loses their connection with a living community (Levine, 1992). This emphasizes once again the interconnection between human experiences and the appropriateness of the use expressive arts to comprehend healing in both, an individual and collective layer.

Poiesis is a term coined by Levine, to refer to the process of art making as the essential ability of human beings to shape the world and bring meaning to existence. According to Levine (1992) psychological suffering is an inherent condition of human existence and therefore, cannot be eliminated, but rather expressed and transformed. Poiesis in grief work would involve the act of creation as a way to respond to loss and shape the new reality into something that is livable to each person. At the same time, Levine & Levine (1999) emphasize that the human experience also involves being in relation with the other, which guides the expressive arts therapy to focus on the therapist's ability to respond to the client's artistic world in accordance with the co-relationship. This way, both characteristics of the expressive arts therapy, the artmaking itself and

the importance of the therapeutic relationship, serve as key culturally sensitive aspects of this form of intervention for grief work.

Expressive Arts Therapy and cultural sensitivity in Peruvian grief work

The use of multiple modalities such as verbal, visual, musical, including drumming and singing, and physical experiences like dancing and sweating, have been used by past healers in diverse cultures, to build bridges between grief and restoration (Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014). Furthermore, the malleable and transdisciplinary nature of the expressive arts therapy can also attune to the development of a wide range of coping strategies proposed by a Dual Process Model of Coping with grief, while remaining compatible with cultural differences (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

According to Estrella (2011), the arts have been used as catalysts for social change throughout history. This author advocates for the use of expressive arts within communities, not only as a healing tool, but also as a way to raise awareness, protest, and provoke conversations. Moreover, this provides the opportunity to become more culturally competent (Estrella, 2011). This perspective can be applied especially in cultures where there is a lack of advocacy and acknowledgement of power dynamics, such as Peru. In this sense, healing can occur when interacting between different realms, individual, family, community and society, and once again, the acknowledgement of losses on every level.

In *A black dog on a green meadow* (Alalú et al., 2011), a group of expressive arts therapists from TAE Peru evaluate the possibility of starting a community development project through the arts in Iquitos, a city in the Jungle. They also discuss an emotional recovery community-based intervention in Ica, a city affected by an earthquake years ago. They faced different challenges regarding lack of commitment from local authorities and conflicts within management in the

different cities. Alalú et al. (2011) describe how the process of creation, and their work with the expressive arts was deeply influenced by the unstable conditions under which the therapists worked: “we must recognize the qualities of our literal reality so that we may begin transformation” (Alalú et al., 2011, p. 207). They highlight the need for Peruvians to recognize their own defense mechanisms of denying their harsh reality. This process on itself, involves recognizing and integrating systemic loss, while engaging in a transformative process. Peru’s cultural reality is also present in the space of creation and accepting it includes “being present in the pain, in the chaos and the violence” (Alalú et al., 2011, p. 204), while respecting the pace of the process. The authors advocate for this sense of awareness as the first step that will allow the possibility of change to emerge, and healing to follow through.

Peruvian culture and expressive therapists, advocate for a community-based approach that enables a reciprocal relationship between individuals, family members, other beings and nature. This opens up the possibility to explore Roger’s Creative Connection model while envisioning the connection to the world as a starting point, leading to an inward journey towards self-exploration. In contrast to Roger’s model, which offers the individual as the foundation of the process, this new suggestion would imply that healing and, thus, grief work would involve a dual pathway in which one connects with the environment, the community, and family, in order to connect within and vice versa. Therefore, in a country where family and community are essential, the expressive arts provide the opportunity to integrate loss on multiple levels.

Morh (2014) elaborates a research project to explore how youth survivors of an earthquake perceive their posttraumatic growth 3 years after the disaster. The study had both art-based intervention and research that aimed to provide support and gain understanding on the loss experienced in the community. The first intervention took nine months and was facilitated by

faculty and students of TAE Peru, with the aim to provide relief and a sense of unity during the hardship. The art-based research involved the production of artistic creations as well as photography and individual interviews with the participants. The main themes related to posttraumatic growth were the importance of remembrance, the need for relatedness or connection to family, friends and the community. This project emphasized the importance of memory and the concept of continuing bond in grief work, as well as the role that community has when providing support to deal with loss. This study highlights the significance of family ties and a sense of belonging to a larger community, as important factors in the healing process within the Peruvian culture. This serves as evidence of how a community-based work may also be relevant when thinking about a culturally sensitive intervention for grief in Peruvian culture. And once again, this study reflects on the relevance of the expressive arts therapy when navigating loss on multiple layers.

Furthermore, Chávez (2016) reflects on the humanistic values found in the traditional healing practice of Curanderismo. This word comes from the Spanish word *curar*, which means “to cure”, “to heal”. The author acknowledges that traditional and indigenous methods of healing are inherent to different cultures all over the world. Indigenous people are diverse and culturally distinct from each other as well, nevertheless, the expressive arts seem to appear as a commonality among many. Peru has a larger indigenous population than other Latina American countries such as Argentina, Chile or Uruguay, where European-descendance make up a larger portion of the population. Cultural fusion between indigenous people and European colonizer have come to create a new racial and cultural mixing called *mestizaje*, that represents a whole new world of values, culture and arts on itself. What we would refer to as ancient traditions have transformed through history, changing and blending with Catholicism into *curanderismo* as a

system of spiritual or religious beliefs that is present in many Latino communities, including Peruvian culture. This example advocates for the acknowledgement of multiple spiritual beliefs and subcultures within one country, when engaging in clinical work. Having said that, the use of the expressive arts in relation to culture-specific spiritual healing may also permit a culturally sensitive lens when thinking about grief work.

Calderón (2015), a Peruvian expressive arts therapist, also examines the encounter between the expressive arts and Peruvian Imagery through images of our earth, its myths, traditions, nature, history and world vision. Through the Quechua word *Tinkuy*, which translates to “meeting” or “encounter,” Calderón (2015) speaks about the possibility of harmony and conciliation, integration and healing. *Tinkuy* can also mean the merging of two rivers, or even a confrontation between two sides, a symbol of what is lost, but also what it is to come. Calderón’s (2015) methodology is grounded on art-based research, interviews from multiple disciplines and community art projects. His approach also emphasizes the strength of interpersonal experiences and their importance while working within a community-oriented culture. This integrative image parallels the appropriateness of the expressive arts therapy when working with a culturally sensitive lens and grief.

Discussion

The integrative nature of the expressive arts therapies and their capacity to connect with the client in a healing process through movement, music, arts, poetry and expressive rituals, allows them to serve as relevant intervention while dealing with grief. At the same time, the creative expression enhances a sense of intimacy and community which can on itself, incite a processing experience to deal with the pain from death and loss. Levine (1992) acknowledges the influence that western culture has had in the separation of the expressive arts and healing. The

disconnect of the artist parallels the isolation of an individual standing on its own. In this sense, being part of a living community and engaging in collective artistic expression, not only enhances a sense of connection and healing, but also provides a space for contention that is needed when working with grief.

Levine (1992) states that the community can contain those in suffering, and even serve as a bond between therapist and the individual. Having said that, the use of expressive arts therapies may also work as bridges to connect individual work with community-oriented approaches, especially in cultures where family and collectivism play such an important role.

The expressive arts and the act of creation itself, serves as an attempt towards integration, and in the context of grief, the possibility to experience the loss while also assimilating to a new reality. Whether it is accepting a current loss, feeling what needs to be felt, and/or reengaging in a new reality, there must be a sense of integration, an encounter, a *Tinkuy*. It may be an encounter between individual, familial, and or communal loss; between past losses and present losses; or a meeting with one's self and with one another as an interconnected collective. It is through the integrative nature of the expressive arts that a transformative process can take place.

The expressive arts therapy as a culturally sensitive intervention in Peruvian culture, would also acknowledge the connection between indigenous, spiritual and nature-based cultural backgrounds. As Calderon (2015) suggests, therapeutic work involves an encounter, a *Tinkuy*, between the expressive arts and Peruvian imagery, between the past and the present; the indigenous and the European-descendant, an integration of both worlds. This cultural mixing is what Chávez (2016) refers as *mestizaje*, the in between of the indigenous peoples and the many cultures that appeared throughout colonizing history. In order to start with the creation process,

to decenter and allow healing, it is important to align the process with decolonization by bringing to awareness situations of injustice and inequality, and therefore, acknowledging systemic losses.

From this standpoint, the expressive arts therapy allows the exploration of a social justice perspective that advocates for a social responsibility to strive for more equitable rights and opportunities for all people, including in grief work. This provides a validating experience for individuals to move along their grieving process from a singular experience, while acknowledging systemic losses and their interaction with each other. A culturally sensitive intervention in grief work would therefore encourage growth and actively oppose to any form of oppression. Within the Peruvian context, it involves acknowledging the individual, familial and collective pasts, and emphasizing the present encounter with the individual, community and therapist, for an exchange and transformation to occur.

Further research is still needed to explore the impact of the current coronavirus COVID - 19 pandemic, which denotes a series of multiple losses experienced worldwide. It would be relevant to consider the juxtaposition of a global health crisis, and the already multiple losses that are experienced individually and systemically in different cultures. Moreover, it would be appropriate to further investigate stigmatized and disenfranchised deaths and their perceptions within different cultures. This would provide the possibility to keep developing culturally sensitive interventions for grief, while advocating responsibly for the validation and support that every grieving individual deserves.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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